



Netanyahu skirts Knesset to pass cyber measures

Public sector to go into state of emergency; 298 Israelis now infected with coronavirus

Ido Efrati, Noa Landau and Haaretz

As the highly contagious novel coronavirus spreads around the world, Israel and the Palestinian Authority have struggled to contain a local outbreak that has virtually halted air traffic in and out of Israel, led to school closures and tens of thousands of people entering quarantine.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Monday the government will bypass Knesset approval and green light "emergency" cyber measures usually used in counter-terrorism to combat the spread of the novel coronavirus. The approval, Netanyahu said, will be valid for thirty days.

The government approved the tracking of cellphones by the Shin Bet security service in order to inform people who were unwittingly close to someone diagnosed with the virus during the two weeks prior to the diagnosis, but the Knesset was dissolved before a dedicated subcommittee could take a decision on the matter.

Israel's public sector will go into a state of emergency, while the private sector will be expected to minimize its output and send 70 percent of its employees home, according to the prime minister.

Essential services such as pharmacies and supermarkets will remain open as usual. In addition, Netanyahu said some key locations where a large amount of patients were diagnosed will go into lockdown.

Top officials from Israel's finance, health, economy and transportation ministries, among others, met to discuss whether to move the public sector into a state of emergency, and order a

This virus won't kill Bibi's bloc

Anshel Pfeffer, Page 2

slowdown in the private sector, as well as the size of the economic safety net for employees and self-employed, according to the Prime Minister's Office.

The Health Ministry announced Monday that the number of coronavirus cases in the country had climbed to 298, with most cases being mild. Earlier in the day it had erroneously released a wrong estimate of 344 patients diagnosed with COVID-19, before revising the number to 277. The Health Ministry said 1,200 people are tested daily, and

that officials were hoping to reach 2,400 tests a day "in the coming days."

"We could get to 10,000 tests a day," said the ministry's deputy director general. According to ministry estimates, several thousands of people in Israel could have contracted the virus and gone undiagnosed.

The Health Ministry also said over 50,000 Israelis are under quarantine, with 1,704 only starting their isolation fortnight on Monday. Over 22,000 have already completed their quarantine, the ministry added.

Amid the crisis, the Knesset started swearing in Israel's 23rd Knesset on Monday. It was being done in 40 rounds of three lawmakers at a time, in line with the latest Health Ministry regulations banning all gatherings of over ten people. Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein, Netanyahu and Gantz were the first three lawmakers to be sworn in, in the presence of President Reuven Rivlin. They were the only elected representatives in attendance to hear Rivlin's and Edelstein's inaugural speeches.

Meanwhile, the Tel Aviv stock exchange halted trading for thirty minutes. Stocks dropped by 8 percent on the

See CYBER, Page 3



Benny Gantz in the Knesset plenum on Monday, during a swearing-in ceremony that was altered by precautions to avoid COVID-19 infection. Gideon Sharon / Knesset

Gantz vows to establish broad government

Kahol Lavan leader now has 28 days to form a coalition; new Knesset sworn in – three at a time

Jonathan Lis, Chaim Levinson and the Associated Press

Kahol Lavan Chairman Benny Gantz vowed Monday to "form a national unity government, as broad as possible, within days" after officially receiving the mandate from President Reuven Rivlin.

Gantz said his government would "heal Israeli society of coronavirus, as well

as the viruses of hatred and division."

"These are not normal days," Gantz said. "Leaders must set aside personal considerations." His government, he said, will represent all parties.

"I extend my elbow," Gantz added, referring to the new guidelines barring handshakes, and called on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to join his party's efforts "to heal Israeli society."

"I have always wanted unity. The time has come for Netanyahu to decide if that's the way he wants to go," Gantz said. "The time has come to set aside the boycotts and destruction and to reconnect all the tribes of Israel and all the citizens of Israel. We will defeat the coronavirus and we will defeat hatred."

Gantz said of Netanyahu's now-delayed corruption trial that "this process has been

accompanied by illegitimate efforts by the current prime minister to evade justice. No man is bigger than the Israeli Zionist project."

"The coronavirus crisis is not the greatest crisis that we have faced. We have known existential, painful crises and we have come through them together," Gantz said. "I urge all decision makers not to panic and to project serenity and security."

Gantz was tasked with

forming a government after a narrow majority of lawmakers recommended him for the post in consultations with Rivlin on Sunday.

Gantz will have 28 days to form a coalition, plus the option of a 14-day extension.

Rivlin urged Gantz to move swiftly to form a government, arguing "a fourth election is impossible at this time of crisis."

See GANTZ, Page 2

Officials: Thousands of Israelis could have COVID-19

Ido Efrati

The number of Israelis testing positive for the coronavirus shot well over 300 on Monday, but health officials say that at the very least hundreds more may have been infected.

They say that as the number of tests grows, an entire layer of the virus' spread will be exposed, as suggested by Defense Minister Naftali Bennett on Sunday.

"It's possible that there are 500 now; maybe there are 1,000 or 5,000 carriers among us," Bennett said. "This week is a critical week because we'll know whether the infection rate is climbing or stable."

Another key question is where Israelis with COVID-19 have been.

Israel isn't testing enough people for the coronavirus, helping cause the uncertainty, health officials say.

Last week more than 700 people were tested; this week the Health Ministry hopes to top 2,000.

Most of the people tested had returned from abroad or were near someone who has since tested positive.

But Israel now has patients whose source of infection is unknown, not a good sign when it comes to the likely spread of the infection.

As reported by Haaretz over the weekend, the Health Ministry has been conservative about who should be tested.

"I released 15 patients today – every one of them might have undiagnosed co-

rona," an emergency room doctor in Jerusalem said.

"Patients come in with classic corona symptoms and circumstances that put them at especially high risk – like a person who shops at a supermarket frequented by many French tourists – and the Health Ministry doesn't approve the test. We take samples that we end up throwing out because we're

not allowed to send them to a lab."

On Saturday, the Health Ministry said hospital staff were now approved to do testing, but capacity is just as much a question. Some health officials say the government will not be able to meet its goal for the number of tests.

See COVID-19, Page 4



The J'lem assisted living facility where officials are refusing to test many residents for COVID-19. See story, Page 3. Emil Salman

COVID-19 takes spirit out of J'lem: 'If you don't feel God you go crazy'



Two nuns walking near the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on Monday. Emmanuel Dunand / AFP

Nir Hasson

At the Western Wall plaza, tape was laid out to separate groups of worshippers. At the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Stone of the Anointing was sanitized and incense was spread. The gates of the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock were closed to worshippers, who prayed instead in the outdoor courts. The prohibitions imposed in an attempt

to limit the coronavirus outbreak have been heard quite well in Jerusalem's Old City. Yisrael Lubin, a Hasid from Jerusalem, passed the afternoon hours at the entrance to the Western Wall plaza, trying to convince men to put on tefillin. "They are scaring people," he said. "I believe that everything comes from the Holy One, Blessed be He. We need to make an effort not to be deterred – although if the time

has come for someone then it has come, if not from bacteria then from an accident. It's easier for the believers. These days, if you don't feel God you go crazy."

Lubin's mission takes on a new meaning in the time of coronavirus: Worshippers fear using the leather straps of the phylacteries because they have passed through many hands. "Here you are under the protection of the Holy One, Blessed Be he –

he loves you," said Lubin in an attempt to calm people down. "It is not a coincidence that no one has died yet here. In other places they are falling like flies."

In the prayer space right in front of the Western Wall, dozens of worshippers moved around – the great majority of them ultra-Orthodox. "What should I do, lie under the bed?" explained one of them, Moish Ben Gabriel. "It won't help to be afraid." The nonreligious visitors and tourists who normally fill the site were now hardly seen there.

On the way from the Western Wall to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, there is another Old City institution hurt by the virus outbreak: The Abu Shukri restaurant. COVID-19 patients 92 and 98 had eaten there last week and the restaurant owners chose to close the place until the storm passes. Most of the adjacent businesses were still open but empty.

The crowded streets and prospering businesses of the Old City stood empty. The movement of police and Border Police officers could be felt – but the police were equipped with masks on their faces.

See CRAZY, Page 2

HAARETZ

Online now

Quarantine reading list

From Camus to Saramago, from Chaucer to Atwood

Wall Street crashes again

Dow Jones tumbles by 13 percent as trading opens



AFP

haaretz.com

Israel's Arab physicians

Fighting pandemic as first-class doctors but second-class citizens

Lee Yaron

It was Saturday evening and she had just finished a 12-hour emergency room shift at Sheba Medical Center, Tel Hashomer, treating suspected COVID-19 patients who were in isolation. Having finally made it home to rest a bit before her next shift, Dr. Suad Haj Yihye Yassin sat down in her living room to watch Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu address the nation about the emergency situation with which she is so very familiar. She's 31, at the end of her residency in clinical immunology. She and her husband, who's a surgeon, live in Tel Hashomer, outside of Tel Aviv, where they are raising their 3-year-old daughter between their long shifts.

"I treat everyone who comes to the hospital, it has never and it will never matter to me if they are Jewish or Arab; every person, no matter their race or gender, will get the best care from me," she says. "When I come home from the emergency room, after I've given my all to treat everyone, and hear the prime minister say that we have to form a

national unity government to deal with the crisis – but without the Arabs, as if we are second-rate citizens – it hurts. Why is it OK for us to be on the front lines in the hospitals dealing with corona, but not legitimate for us to be in the government?"

Over the past week she had encountered a number of social media posts by Netanyahu, who repeatedly wrote on his Facebook page that a government with the predominantly Arab Joint List would be "a disaster for Israel," or a "danger to Israel." On Sunday Netanyahu added, "While Prime Minister Netanyahu is managing an unprecedented global and national crisis in the most responsible and balanced way, [Kahol Lavan Chairman Benny] Gantz is galloping toward a minority government that's dependent on Balad, Heba Yabak and supporters of terror, rather than join a national emergency government that will save lives."

"It's sad to hear the prime minister refer to me as a ticking danger, when in fact we are the ones who are neutralizing the danger and saving patients," says Yassin. "In the hospitals the

work of Jewish-Arab teams together is an example of exemplary coexistence; we all work together, shoulder to shoulder, without any distinctions."

Her remarks shed light on a missing piece of the political-medical puzzle of recent weeks that Netanyahu is trying to obscure. According to official figures from the Health Ministry and the Central Bureau of Statistics provided at the request of Haaretz, 17 percent of Israel's physicians, 24 percent of its nurses and 47 percent of its pharmacists are Arabs. If the Arab doctors and nurses were to strike over the government discourse that incites against them, or if they would even threaten to strike until they were properly represented in government, the health system would not be able to deal with the coronavirus crisis, and the equation that Netanyahu is trying to claim as truth would fall apart.

But from conversations with Arab doctors in various Israeli hospitals, it repeatedly emerges that they are willing to cooperate

See DOCTORS, Page 2